

possums to reappear after a disturbance.

The animals were so numerous that it was impossible to recognise individuals and to work out their social interactions without marking them. However, there was a fair amount of fighting between them. It also appeared that the males may have been feeding more during the day while the females and young were seen more in the evening and early morning.

The Honey Possums responded to the alarm call of the New Holland Honeyeaters in the area. When kestrels flew overhead and the honeyeaters called, the Honey Possums disappeared into the undergrowth and "froze". One evening the honeyeaters appeared very agitated over some unseen threat. For several hours during the disturbance not a single Honey Possum was seen. An observer arriving on the scene during this period would have assumed the site to have been devoid of these marsupials.

On one occasion between 0530hrs and 0900hrs, numerous matings were observed. On this morning there seemed to be more activity in the bushes. There was a lot of fighting. The males, which are much smaller than the females, crept up on the females and mated. Sometimes the pair actually fell to the ground during the process. Mating seemed to last about 20 – 30 seconds. Because the animals were so numerous it was hard to determine whether the same male was mating repeatedly with a particular female. However, it seemed that the males were guarding their females, and that fighting broke out when another male started to approach a guarded female.

Tiger Snakes were seen hunting very stealthily in the bushes where the Honey Possums were, although they were not actually seen catching prey.

Because of the surprise of seeing so many Honey Possums, the area was surveyed to see how far the population extended. Around the camp site near Jorndee Creek the Possums were numerous wherever there were *Calothamnus* bushes. Other places in the vicinity of the camp site where there were clumps of *Calothamnus* were found to have Honey Possums, but they were not as numerous.

Subsequently, *Calothamnus* bushes were examined at Cape Le Grande and the Fitzgerald River National Parks but no Honey Possums were seen. We assume, therefore, a localised population explosion had occurred in the original observation area, and that competition for food may have prompted the diurnal feeding behaviour.

Most of these observations were also noted by John and Helen Start who visited the same area from 17 – 19 October 1993, although they did not see the animals mating.

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Darter at Karonie in the Eastern Goldfields – On 6 April 1993 we observed a solitary Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* on the old railway water supply dam at Cardunia Rocks near Karonie approximately 100 km east of Kalgoorlie. In spite of widespread and heavy rains in the Goldfields in 1992 and extensive wetland survey work as a consequence, this is only the second record in the region that we are aware of. Storr (1986, *Birds of the Southeastern Interior of Western Australia*,

Rec. West. Aust. Mus. Suppl No. 26.) mentions one record, a vagrant (WAM A3291) collected at Kanowna in 1929.

- A. CHAPMAN and G. PRONK, CALM, P.O. Box 10173, Kalgoorlie, W.A. 6430.

Female Elephant Seal visits Eyre Bird Observatory - On 5 November 1992, we accompanied a group of visitors on the weekly wader and seabird survey along Kanidal Beach. At 14km west of the Eyre Observatory we observed a large marine mammal basking on a rock about a metre above the water and 100 m from the shore. After about 10 minutes it moved into the sea and swam away.

On 10 November we saw what appeared to be the same animal sleeping on a sand dune at Kanidal Beach. We approached to within two metres and observed it closely. We identified it as a female Elephant Seal after consulting the Australian Museum's *Complete Book of Australian Mammals*. We made this identification because: the animal was 200 - 260 cm long, it had no external ear, it was grey brown in colour with no markings, it had hind legs developed into flippers which were directed backwards, it moved with a "humping", not quadrupedal motion, and it had claws on the ends of its front flippers.

Its appearance matched photos we have seen of female Elephant Seals and it did not possess the greater size and bulbous nose of the male. It remained on the dune sleeping and occasionally scratching for about 24 hours before disappearing. It was seen again on 18 November resting on a weed bank at the edge of the water 5 km west of the Eyre Bird

Observatory but moved off into the sea and swam away after several backward looks. The animal was photographed at this time but has not been seen since.

According to W.A. Museum records Elephant Seals have been sighted and photographed at Moses Rock in July 1977 and Yallingup Beach in August 1981. The Elephant Seal is distributed mainly in sub-Antarctic latitudes and they rarely come ashore in Australia since the Bass Strait population was hunted to extinction in the 19th century.

- RITA and GEORGE WATKINS, Eyre Bird Observatory

Grey Falcons on Nullarbor Plain - On 4 May 1993 I saw a small flock of five Grey Falcons *Falco hypoleucos* on the northern Nullarbor Plain (126°40', 30°10') or approximately 100 km north of Kybo Station Homestead. The falcons were perching in dead Myall *Acacia papyrocarpa* in open Bluebush *Maireana sedifolia* plain. According to *The Atlas of Australian Birds* small flocks of this size are indicative of recent breeding with the juveniles remaining with the parents for a short period of time. Under the Wildlife Conservation Act the Grey Falcon is declared rare fauna in Western Australia.

- ANDREW CHAPMAN, CALM, P.O. Box 10173, Kalgoorlie W.A. 6430

Fork-tailed Swifts in Roleystone - On 25 November 1992 I saw a large flock of Fork-tailed Swifts *Apus pacificus* over Roleystone. At about 0855 hours I noticed the birds flying high over Canning Valley and for the next 15 minutes a spectacular "flypast" took place involving at least